

Teachers Resource Guide

Joan Peirce Transcript

Who are you and why are you at Jamestown (or in Virginia)? What year is it?

I pray you, allow me to present myself. I be Mistress Joan Peirce, wife to Captain William Peirce. I come to Virginia in 1609 with my husband and daughter. We was part of the third supply of settlers to the colony and it were a large fleet of nine ships that sailed that summer. My daughter and I sailed on Blessing-there was twenty women and children aboard her. My husband sailed on Sea Venture. We have been living here in Virginia for nearly thirty years and we have prospered here, as we never would have in England. We have a house in Jamestown and one on our plantation on Mulberry Island. And my husband is a member of the Council of Government. We have traveled hither to Jamestown this day as the General Court is in session and my husband hath business.

Describe your daily activities

I spend much of my time either working in my garden or preserving food for the winter for I must feed not only my family, but our servants as well. When the fruits and vegetables in the garden are ripe, they will be picked. Some will be dried-such as the figs from my garden in Jamestown and the beans from the fields on our plantation, and some will be pickled. I work daily with the herbs from my garden. Some I will use to make medicines and some I will dry to hang in the windows or strew upon the floors of our house. For tis' of the greatest importance to keep the house sweet smelling-for bad smells cause sickness and disease. For that reason I make scented water for the scent bottles we carry about our persons. When I feel the need to sit and rest a bit, I attend to the sewing and mending of clothes. There is always much work to be done.

What do you think about Jamestown and Virginia?

I come to Virginia in 1609 and I have seen Jamestown grow and prosper since that time. I recall in 1624 when Virginia become a royal colony that there was but 1200 people to live in all of Virginia and Jamestown were but a small village-there were not a building of brick or stone in the entire town. Today, in 1639 there be 5,000 people to live in the colony and Jamestown hath grown-indeed, we have a brick house in the town today and this year the Governor proposes to build a brick church where the wooden one now stands. And we have industries in Jamestown-a potter, a brewery and an apothecary. Knowest you, we wish Virginia to be like England and methinks good progress hath been made.

What expectations do you have for your future?

Virginia be a good place to live. Captain Peirce and I come hither with little or nothing and we have prospered here as many others have done. Most people come to Virginia for land-land upon which to plant tobacco. Few come to the colony to work as tradesmen-for there be opportunities enough in England to make things to sell, but where in England is there land for the likes of us? No where! Here in Virginia there is land a plenty. Settlers in the colony receive 50 acres of land for just coming hither and paying for their own passage. And there be more land if you pay for others to come hither-50 acres for each person whose passage you pay. My husband and I have gained hundreds of acres in this manner. Aye, Virginia be a good place to live!

Items that would identify Joan Peirce:

Hand basket for carrying items

Thimble-she would have used it to sew or mend clothes

Scent Bottle-she talks of scent bottles to fend off odors or illnesses

Picture of Brick Church-a sign of progress to her, the permanent church being built